DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 244 465 EC 162 478

AUTHOR Milner, Betty
TITLE Child Mental Health Services, Inc.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 6p.; In: Meeting Their Needs: Provision of Services to the Severely Emotionally Disturbed and Autistic. p312-316. Conference Proceedings (Memphis, TN, April 27-28, 1983). (EC 162 463).
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Autism; Daily Living Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; *Residential Programs; *Schizophrenia; *Special Schools

ABSTRACT

School and residential therapeutic programs of Child Health Mental Services, Inc. serving schizophrenic, autistic, and emotionally disturbed children and youth (2-21 years old) are described. The residential components include a family unit home as well as a supervised apartment living program. Admissions procedures for the school program are reviewed in terms of the referral process, and admissions committee composition is described. The program, centered on a biochemical orientation, focuses on behavioral, communication, functional living, vocational, and functional academic skills. The residential unit incorporates an age span of "family" members and emphasizes skills for independent living, socialization, and coping. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED244465

CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, INC.

Betty Milner, Director
Allan Cott School

Child Mental Health Services, Inc. was founded in 1973 as a non-profit organization devoted to developing and implementing comprehensive services for schizophrenic, autistic, and emotionally disturbed individuals.

Allan Cott School was the first program of Child Mental Health Services, Inc. The school opened in September, 1974, and is a day school for schizophrenic, autistic, and severely disturbed children. The school serves individuals who can not be maintained in a public school program, but who can benefit from a structured learning environment that is designed specifically to meet their needs. We began with 16 children between the ages of 4 and 12, and have expanded to 50 children from ages 2 through 19. Allan Cott School contracts with seven local school agencies to provide educational services for this population.

Camp Sunshine South began in 1975 as the second program of Child Mental Health Services, Inc. The camp operated the first year as a day camp program for severely disturbed children.

From 1976-1979, the camp operated as a therapeutic, residential camp. The children admitted to the camp program participated in a recreational and educational program which was designed to teach skills such as swimming, hiking, crafts, boating, fishing, athletics, and other group games. The residential camp offered the severely disturbed child the opportunity to learn new skills, and at the same time provided a seven week respite time for the parents.

In 1980 and 1981, Child Mental Health Services, Inc. has operated a day camp at Mountain Brook Baptist Church. The day camp program operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 3:30. The day camp program has been carried out in place of the residential camping program due to the lack of an adequate residential camp facility. The day camp provides valuable services, and teaches some of the same skills that are taught in the residential, therapeutic camp; however, the activities are more restricted.

McDonough House is a part of the residential component of Child Mental Health Services, Inc. The McDonough House provides a residential, therapeutic, living situation for autistic, schizophrenic, and severely disturbed children. The children served at McDonough House are 6-21 years of age, and participate in the Allan Cott School program.

McDonough House is set up as a family unit. Two houseparents are in residence with six children. The home provides both a structured program that teaches independent daily living

EC 162178

skills, and a supportive environment that offers as much as possible a family atmosphere. McDonough House has been in operation since March, 1980. The present home is located in a neighborhood setting in the Birmingham area.

Parkland Place is another component of the residential services provided by Child Mental Health Services, Inc. Parkland Place offers a supervised Apartment Living Program that provides a community residential program for young adults that have been diagnosed schizophrenic. The goal of Parkland Place is to help residents learn, through a structured program of classes, etc., to live successfully with their illness.

The program is housed in a six unit community-based apartment building. Two residents share a comfortably furnished two bedroom apartment, and one apartment is used for classes and staff who provide twenty-four hour supervision.

All residents participate in a structured schedule of daily activities including classes, exercise, meal planning and preparation, crafts, and various cultural and educational outings. The ultimate goal of the program is to teach residents to become a functional member of society who is capable of independent living and working with a very minimum amount of supervision.

The supervised apartment living complex is located in a community in Birmingham that is supportive of the purpose, and that is easily accessible to churches, stores, parks, transportation, and other community resources.

Admissions Procedure

Allan Cott School serves autistic, schizophrenic, and severely disturbed individuals between the ages of 2 and 21. Referrals come from local boards of education, speech and hearing clinics, mental health centers, and psychiatrists. The referral process involves:

1) Contact with local education agency responsible for student
2) Completion of application form
3) Psychiatric evaluation to determine primary diagnosis
4) Accumulation of previous evaluations (academic, language, hearing, psychological, occupational therapy)
5) Presentation to Admissions Committee

The Admissions Committee is composed of psychiatrists and representatives from local education and mental health agencies. This group determines the eligibility of the child by reviewing the information compiled with the application. The determination of the least restrictive environment for optimal learning and behavior change is equally important.

Child Mental Health Services, Inc.--Allan Cott School

Program Description

The philosophy of the Allan Cott School program is based on a biochemical orientation. Because of a brain chemistry dysfunction, these students are believed to suffer from perceptual disorientation which causes them to perceive the world in a disturbed manner. This perceptual disorientation involves auditory, visual and tactile stimuli - all the senses that we use to orient ourselves to the world around us. Input is not being properly processed, and this results in a bizarre perception of the environment.

Our task is to look at the ways in which our students relate to the people and objects around them; and then try to teach more appropriate responses. Presentation of stimuli in more than one way can take advantage of the senses that are functioning more effectively. An example of this is the use of sign language. It has been long felt that these individuals are not processing auditory input properly. Sign language is used to take advantage of the visual sense. The pairing of visual and auditory stimulation is an effective way to present information; and through this double barrel approach, the chances of the student understanding input is greatly improved.

Primary program emphasis centers on the following areas:

1) Behavioral - developing and implementing programs to deal with and decrease inappropriate and undesirable behaviors.

2) Communication - the establishment and increase of communication skills, whether verbal, sign, or symbolic.

3) Functional living - training in self-help, self-direction/ leisure time behavior, and home tasks.

4) Vocational - the teaching of appropriate work behaviors, and skill training in specific work related tasks.

5) Functional Academics - the adaptation of academic tasks into daily activities.

Treatment modalities encompass a wide range of therapeutic techniques. The basics of behavior management are refined and adapted to meet the individual needs of the students. Sensory stimulation activities are supervised and carried out by occupational therapists working with the classroom teacher. Movement and dance therapy is provided through the Creative Dance Foundation, which works with area schools. Much emphasis is placed on functioning, not only independently, but in small and large groups. Attention is paid to the coping skills of the

students in different situations and under different kinds of stress. Language stimulation occurs continually through the day, utilizing a total communication system of signing paired with spoken language. For those students with already existing communication skills, comprehension and functional use of language is stressed. Vocational activities are incorporated into the daily school day. Younger students are involved in pre-vocational tasks such as sorting, assembly, and collating. Older students work on specific work tasks that produce a finished product. Functional living skills are stressed and much involvement with families occurs in training in this area. The acquisition of functional living skills will take some of the daily care responsibilities off the shoulders of the family.

Staff

The professional staff of Allan Cott consists of a Director, Special Education teachers, Speech Therapists, and Occupational Therapists. Each classroom has a head teacher and an assistant who work with from four to five students. Area colleges place students in special education, psychology, psychiatric nursing, and related mental health fields to work at the school for practicum experience. Additional volunteer help is provided through civic groups, high schools, and individuals wishing to involve themselves with this population of students.

Much importance is placed on hiring creative people who are continually evaluating and improving programs. Staffings are held three times a week, where the individual programs are discussed and revised. The sharing of ideas and concern for students goes to creating a stimulating, caring environment.

Parental Involvement

Parents are an important part of the program at Allan Cott School. Beginning with the writing and implementation of the IEP, family members are encouraged to visit the school and become a part of the educational process. Programs are designed to assist the family in coping with home behaviors.

The Allan Cott Parents' Association functions as a support and educational group, providing a place to discuss mutual concerns. They are also actively involved in fund raising projects, buying much needed equipment, raising camp scholarships, and participating in the annual Holiday Pecan Sale.

Residential

McDonough House is the residential component of Allan Cott School, providing a therapeutic living situation for autistic, schizophrenic and severely disturbed children and adolescents. McDonough House is set up as a family unit. Two houseparents are in residence with five to six children, ranging in age from six to eighteen. The make-up of the group is important; and careful attention is given to establishing a workable family

unit. The age span provides a realistic situation of older children helping younger ones and more capable children helping the lower functioning. The goal of McDonough House is to provide a structured program in which the person may learn; but at the same time offering a "home" rather than an institution. A committee drawn from the Board of Directors of Child Mental Health Services, Inc. serves as an advisory group; setting policy as well as assisting in screening children applying to the McDonough House program. The initial application is reviewed by the Admissions Committee of Allan Cott School, with the McDonough House Committee then picking those children to enter the program when an opening becomes available.

The residents of McDonough House attend Allan Cott School with the home program supervised by the Residential Manager. Staffings are held with houseparents, Residential Manager, School Director, teachers, and consultants on a regular basis. Treatment plans are established, reviewed and revised by this group.

Program emphasis at McDonough House covers the following areas:

1) Skills for Independent Living - The teaching of self-care and daily living skills is a primary thrust of the program. Careful attention is given to those areas that would make the person a functioning and productive family member. These skills include: household tasks such as sweeping, making beds, laundry, preparing meals, setting and clearing the table, loading dishwasher and vacuuming. Also included are those self-help skills such as bathing, shampooing hair, dressing and personal hygiene tasks.

2) Socialization - Those skills that contribute to appropriate interactions with family and peers are stressed in the program. Communication skills, whether verbal, written, or sign are taught within the context of daily living. The development of leisure skills for individual as well as group activities are important; as well as developing structures which provide a productive and efficient family unit.

3) Coping Skills - A vital part of the treatment plan is the establishment of the confines under which each person best functions. Defining the limits of self-control aids the staff in establishing the amount of stress each person is able to handle in given situations.